U.S. Dismisses Cases Of 800 Protesters

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The U.S. attorney's office yesterday dismissed charges against more than 800 demonstrators arrested at the U. S. Capitol during the Mayday antiwar protests.

The dismissals, which had been expected, came in the wake of a Superior Court acquittal of eight of the defendants last month following a two-week jury trial.

The trial initially had been billed as a test of the government's ability to convict the demonstrators who were arrested on unlawful entry charges on the Capitol steps on May 5.

Yesterday Harold Titus, acting U. S. Attorney, denied the trial had been a test case. He said the government had decided to drop the remaining charges to further "the fair and efficient administration of justice in the District of Columbia."

"Although the government believes that there is ample evidence tending to show that the defendants conducted themselves in an unlawful manner . . . we are convinced from our recent experience in a trial of eight of the defendants . . . that jury verdicts of guilty in the remaining cases are highly unlikely," Titus said.

"The improbability of obtaining jury guilty verdicts . . . stems from the fact that the defendants were invited to the Capitol steps by several congressmen who testified on their behalf at the last trial."

The dismissals were viewed by defense attorneys as vindication of their contention the arrests were an attempt to stifle political dissent.

"The decision reflects some recognition by the government that continuous and relentless prosecution of citizens dedicated to speaking out against a brutal, unjust and immoral war cannot succeed . . ." Peter Weisman, one attorney, said.

Although about 12,000 were initially arrested in the Mayday protests, Washington courts have disposed of all but about 400 cases. The vast majority were dismissed because of lack of evidence. Most of the remaining cases involve persons arrested on disorderly conduct charges.